



December 22, 2025
Study Guide
Lead Pastor Brian Bales
Carols of Advent: *LOVE*

The Visit of the Wise Men

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.” ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ⁶ “‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’” ⁷ Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. ⁸ And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” ⁹ After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. ¹⁰ When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. ¹¹ And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. ¹² And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

Matthew 2:1-12 (ESV)

COMMENTARY

In the days of Herod the king: This was the one known as Herod the Great. Herod was indeed great; in some ways great as a ruler, builder and administrator; in other ways great in politics and cruelty.

i. *“He was wealthy, politically gifted, intensely loyal, an excellent administrator, and clever enough to remain in the good graces of successive Roman emperors. His famine relief was superb and his building projects (including the temple, begun 20 B.C.) were admired even by his foes. But he loved power, inflicted incredibly heavy taxes on the people, and resented the fact that many Jews considered him a usurper. In his last years, suffering an illness that compounded his paranoia, he turned to cruelty and in fits of rage and jealousy killed close associates.”* (Carson)

ii. *“Augustus, the Roman Emperor, had said, bitterly, that it was safer to be Herod’s pig than Herod’s son. (The saying is even more epigrammatic in Greek, for in Greek huios is the word for a pig, and huios is the word for a son).”* (Barclay)

iii. *The reign of Herod also gives us a chronological marking point. “Jesus was born before the death of Herod the Great, which is probably to be dated in 4 BC; the exact date of Jesus’ birth is unknown.”* (France)

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

a. *When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled: Herod was constantly on guard against threats to his rule, especially from his own family. He assassinated many family members whom he suspected of disloyalty. His being troubled is completely in character.*

i. *Herod, who wanted to be accepted by the Jews whom he ruled, was not a Jew at all but an Edomite, and Rome recognized him as a vassal king over Judea. The Jews tempered their great hatred of him with admiration for his building projects, such as the magnificent improvements made to the second temple.*

ii. *Barclay reminds us of what a bloody, violent ruler Herod was: “He had no sooner come to the throne than he began by annihilating the Sanhedrin...he slaughtered three hundred court officers...he murdered his wife Mariamne, and her mother Alexandra, his eldest son Antipater, and two other sons, Alexander and Aristobulus.”*

c. **Wise men from the East came:** *These travelers are called **wise men**, which in the ancient Greek is magoi. Misconceptions and legends abound about these wise men. They were not kings but **wise men**, which means they were astronomers. There were not only three, but probably a great company. They seem to have come not on the birth night, but probably several months later.*

A Life Application Study Guide

James 1:22-25 tells us to put into practice what we are discovering in God’s word.

Discussion Points

1. If you are familiar with the 5 Love Languages written by Gary Chapman, you know that we each define how we feel loved by others in a way that is unique to us. Today Brian asks us to consider the story of *The Wise Men* (Greek - *Magoi*) and where they exhibited *love* woven throughout their story more than 2000 years ago as they followed a star to the baby Messiah King.

Questions to consider:

- Consider a time when you were so curious about something or someone that you were willing to travel and explore to learn more about what it was that had captured your attention.
 - What was the event or catalyst that motivated you to seek out what you needed to see and experience firsthand? What were the *risks* and what were the *rewards* and how did you get there?
 - The wise men who were astronomers didn't have GPS (could we navigate without it?) and yet God guided them using something very familiar to them. When has God used something familiar to you to both communicate and guide you to where He wanted you to go?
- 2. Herod the King who ruled during the time when Jesus was born was wealthy, politically gifted, intensely loyal and viciously cruel. Herod ordered the killing of hundreds of court officers along with his wife, her mother and several of his sons. He was a brutal ruler and became more paranoid as an illness progressed. How do these details impact your interpretation of this familiar story?
 - Today, who might you think of as you look more closely at Herod the King and how he ruled, retained his power and secretly summoned the *wise men* to gather information in order to find and kill the baby Jesus?
 - Who today in the year 2024 might resemble the 3 *magoi*? Commentary and historical accounts imply that the *wise men* traveled as part of a larger caravan of cohorts, and not just the 3 that are mentioned, likely their names were: *Melchior, Caspar, and Balthasar*.
 - What do you imagine these 3 astronomers knew about King Herod and his reputation? How might this have influenced their choices as their story unfolded?
- 3. As the story progresses it becomes evident that Jesus' birth and His arrival as King impacted people differently. We see 3 unique responses to the arrival of King Jesus:
 1. Herod displayed an open hatred and hostility toward Jesus.
 2. The chief priests and the scribes were indifferent toward Jesus, all the while retaining their religious respectability.
 3. The wise men sought out Jesus and worshipped Him – even at great cost.
- 4. What can we learn about what *love* looks like from the Wise Men, *Melchior, Caspar, and Balthasar*?

Where in the observations below do you see evidence of love in their actions?

- They were not satisfied to gaze at the star and admire it; they *did* something and set out and followed it. They traveled with their fellow astronomers to find the baby King.
 - They persevered in their search to follow both the star and God's divine guidance.
 - They were not influenced or discouraged in their search by a brutal king or indifferent religious leaders.
 - They rejoiced because of what the star represented.
 - When they arrived at the destination the star led them to, they entered the home and they worshipped the baby King, (not His parents).
 - They brought gifts intended for a King.
 - They sensed an urgency to worship Him *immediately* and did not wait.
 - Being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way.
 - They were obedient to the heavenly dream and left without serving as Herod's informants.
5. How will these passages in Matthew 22:37-39 and 1 Corinthians 13 influence you in the way that you love God and others?

And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸ This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹ And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned,^[a] but have not love, I gain nothing.⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful;^[b]⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

⁸ Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹ For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰ but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. ¹¹ When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.¹² For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully

known.¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

6. When the Wise Men followed the star and set out to find the Baby King Messiah their hearts were filled with hope. When they met the Baby King Messiah their hearts were filled with a love that they had never experienced. How are you thinking about **love** differently now?

LIVING IT OUT

This week you may encounter someone who needs to hear about the birth of Jesus in a new way. How will you prepare your heart to share this story of peace, hope, joy and love?